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10 June 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy to the DCI for the
Intelligence Community

THROUGH : Deputy Director for Intelligence

SUBJECT : Role of the Strategic Warning Staff

REFERENCE : Memorandum, Organization and Function of
the Strategic Warning Staff, dtd 7 June
1976, from ADD/OSR

1. We believe that it would be premature to make any major shifts in the organization or functions of the Strategic Warning Staff, such as are outlined in the reference memorandum.

2. The SWS was established only a scant year and a half ago. It replaced a twenty-year-old strategic warning mechanism, the Watch Committee and its staff at the National Indications Center, which the community agreed had outlived its usefulness. The SWS was set up, after extensive community discussions, as a new mechanism which could do a better job in (a) analyzing the indicators that the USSR, China, or North Korea might be planning hostile military action, and (b) helping the community sound the necessary warning.

3. The SWS was designed to provide a better "second-look" at strategic warning than the old Watch Committee structure did. It was designed to supplement the work done by current intelligence units in the community in ringing the warning bell. But it was based on the principle that there must be a place where the sole focus is looking closely at the warning indicators, without being bogged down by any requirements to produce current intelligence on many related topics.

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SUBJECT: Role of the Strategic Warning Staff

4. The SWS is in a unique position to do its job. It receives and reviews more intelligence on strategic warning than any other office in the contributing agencies. Its location permits access to related military operational plans of the US and its allies--moves which might be provoking hostile enemy action. It receives highly sensitive reporting from its contributor agencies. It reviews indicators and it produces timely and provocative think-pieces on warning in its monthly.

5. There are several specific points that we would take issue with in the text of the reference memorandum.

a. With regard to Para 1: The SWS is just as well equipped to give strategic warning as it is to study warning indicators. It is a focal point to which all material pertinent to warning flows. It is in constant touch with all the relevant people in the community who work on the warning problem. It can task the various field commands in a matter of seconds. It can respond rapidly.

b. Para 2: Of course, strategic warning is a function of the whole community. Nobody ever said it was not. It is the function of the SWS to continually remind and prod the community on this point. The SWS has [] [] analysts. It does receive all the available intelligence reporting needed to give warning.

c. Para 3: The problem has indeed been one of failure--for example, Korea twice (the reason for the Watch Committee in the first place) and Cuba once. Further, the Watch Committee's least common denominator approach to the Czechoslovakian crisis was one of the reasons for the new machinery.

d. Para 4: Funding through the DCI might encourage State, Navy, and Army participation. Navy support is sorely needed.

e. Para 5: The SWS can not reasonably be expected to get by with fewer analysts. If it had the [] called for by its table of organization it could do more of what is desired in para 5, although it is already doing some.

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25X1 f. Para 6: The Special Assistant for Strategic Warning [redacted] reports directly to the DCI, not his subordinate the Director, Strategic Warning. The present arrangement has worked well with the latter maintaining a close relationship with the NIO mechanism as well as with other production shops in the community.

g. Para 7: This memorandum in our judgment is not a CIA position and should not be billed as one. We expect that it will run into rough sledding in Review Group meetings from DIA, State, NSA and the services. In each of these agencies there is strong sentiment to increase the responsibilities and focus of the SWS--if anything to have it enlarged to review indications of any sort of military or critical developments throughout the world.

6. We believe therefore that any shifts now in the role or organization of the SWS would be premature. We recommend that the staff be given further time to play its present role. Rather than trimming the SWS back, we recommend that renewed efforts be made to flesh it out to its full strength, so that all the NFIB agencies are giving it the support it deserves.

[redacted]

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Former Director
Strategic Warning Staff

[redacted]

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Alternate CIA Member
Strategic Warning Review Group

[redacted]

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William K. Parmenter
Director of Current Intelligence

Att: reference

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7 June 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy to the DCI for the Intelligence Community

SUBJECT : Organization and Function of the Strategic Warning Staff

1. The Strategic Warning Staff (SWS) by DCID No. 1/5 has two basic functions--first, to study warning indicators of hostile military action against the US by the USSR, China, and North Korea, and second, to give warning of such action. The SWS is well suited to accomplish the first function by virtue of the make-up of its interagency staff and its position within the intelligence community. But, the SWS is not equipped, nor does it operate, in a manner which enables it to give strategic warning of hostilities.

2. Strategic warning is a function and responsibility of the entire intelligence community. If the President is not warned of a hostile action which occurs, the community--not any one agency or staff--has failed. The warning function and the heavy responsibility that goes with it cannot, by any stretch of institutional charters or internetting of directorships, be made the principal duty of a surrogate staff, however talented and dedicated its members might be. The SWS has only about [] analysts. It does not work weekends or maintain a 24-hour watch. It does not receive all of the available intelligence reporting needed to give warning of hostilities.

3. Underlying the SWS charter is the presumption that a small staff which focuses on the warning problem is insurance against the possibility, however slim, that the community either will not perceive or will fail to report indicators of hostilities against the US. This is unrealistic and certainly unwarranted by the history of past crises. The problem has never

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been one of failure to recognize a growing threat of hostilities (e.g., the Czech crisis 1968) but rather the interpretation of the indicators. Yet, when it comes to interpretation, the SWS is no more qualified or gifted (in fact, it may be less so) than the best and most experienced brains in the community. The conclusion is clear: the SWS cannot do a better job at warning than the community as a whole, and the charter of the SWS should be changed to relieve it of that responsibility.

4. In my opinion, the SWS should be developed as the intelligence community's Center for the Study of Warning Intelligence. Because it reports directly to the DCI, the SWS should be funded through the DCI's separate budget and should be allocated analyst slots accountable to the DCI and not to any agency. This arrangement would encourage agencies to assign analysts to the SWS for longer periods of time since analysts assigned to the SWS could be replaced and scheduled research need not be postponed.

5. Moreover, as a Center for the Study of Warning Intelligence, the SWS could operate with a smaller staff. Its functions would be mainly three-fold:

- To identify issues and problems of warning intelligence by analyzing, for example, the warning potential of new collection systems and by critiquing the warning processes in past crises;
- To initiate and manage interagency studies of these issues either by setting up ad hoc working groups or soliciting contributions to papers to be written by SWS staff members. In this way the SWS could more effectively exploit the community's expertise, drawing on specialists who are not now available to the SWS because their parent agencies consider them indispensable.
- To communicate the results of these studies through articles in a quarterly SWS journal (vice the present monthly and weekly issuances) or by publication of special SWS reports.

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-- If need be, the present weekly Alert List could be continued by drawing on current intelligence publication and tasking individual offices for inputs.

6. Because these functions parallel in many respects those of a National Intelligence Officer, consideration might be given to designating the director of the SWS as the NIO for Strategic Warning. This would place the study of warning intelligence on a par with other priority substantive concerns of the intelligence community and ensure that the warning implications of significant events are considered at the national level.

7. Under this concept the SWS could provide the community a unique and valuable service not now being performed by any agency. I am sending copies of this memorandum to Bill Parmenter and [redacted] and recommend that this matter be discussed at the forthcoming meeting of the Strategic Warning Review Group.

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Acting Deputy Director
Strategic Research

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